

# What Works Clearinghouse



## Character Education

Revised September 8, 2006

## An Ethics Curriculum for Children

- Program description** *An Ethics Curriculum for Children*, a read-aloud literature-based curriculum, aims to teach elementary school students seven universal attributes of good character. Lessons and home assignments are organized around multicultural stories. The program activities are designed to connect the experiences of characters in the stories to students' own lives. *An Ethics Curriculum for Children* also includes integration of character education themes across curricular topics and parental notification and involvement, optional parts of the implementation of this program.
- Research** One study of *An Ethics Curriculum for Children* met the WWC evidence standards with reservations. This study included nearly 1,000 elementary students attending semirural school districts in western Pennsylvania and southern Illinois. The study examined effects on students' behavior and knowledge, attitudes, and values.<sup>1</sup>
- Effectiveness** *An Ethics Curriculum for Children* was found to have no discernible effects on behavior or on knowledge, attitudes, and values.

	Behavior	Knowledge, attitudes, and values	Academic achievement
<b>Rating of effectiveness</b>	No discernible effects	No discernible effects	Not reported
<b>Improvement index<sup>2</sup></b>	Average: 0 percentile points Range: -4 to +4 percentile points	Average: +5 percentile points Range: -8 to +14 percentile points	Not reported

1. The evidence presented in this report is based on the available research. Findings and conclusions may change as new research becomes available.
2. These numbers show the average and the range of improvement indices, for all findings across the two subsamples in the study. The range is based on variations in grade level. The improvement index for grades 1-3 is -4 and for grades 4-6 is +4 percentile points.

## Additional program information

### Developer and contact

Heartwood Institute, 425 North Craig Street, Suite 302, Pittsburgh, PA 15213. Web: [www.heartwoodethics.org](http://www.heartwoodethics.org). Email: [hrtwood@heartwoodethics.org](mailto:hrtwood@heartwoodethics.org). Telephone: 800-432-7810.

### Scope of use

*An Ethics Curriculum for Children*, created in the early 1990s, has been used in more than 1,500 schools in 40 states. Information is not available about the characteristics of students, schools, or districts using the curriculum. *An Ethics Curriculum for Children* may have changed since the study was conducted. The WWC recommends asking the developer for information about the most current version of this curriculum and taking into account that student demographics and school context may affect outcomes.

## Research Teaching

Each of the six elementary curriculum kits includes 14 lessons, with two lessons for each of the seven core attributes. Each lesson includes reading an illustrative story aloud, class discussion, reflective journaling, and small-group or individual activities. The developers suggest creating a comfortable story corner for children in the classroom. They estimate that two to four weeks are needed for children to assimilate each attribute. Teachers are encouraged to extend the lessons from the stories to other subject matter. The curriculum manual offers ideas for planning lessons and integrating character education-based

Three studies reviewed by the WWC investigated the effects of *An Ethics Curriculum for Children*. One study (Leming, 2000) was a quasi-experimental design that met WWC evidence standards with reservations. The other two studies did not meet WWC evidence screens. The Leming study included 965 elementary school students in semi-rural school districts in western

activities across academic areas. Teachers can engage parents and families through family orientation meetings or by sending a letter home that explains the program.

Curriculum kits provide the materials to implement the curriculum. A Spanish kit with Spanish language materials is available for use in kindergarten through grade three. Supplemental materials—such as posters, maps, buttons, and music CDs—can be obtained through the Heartwood Institute’s website at [www.heartwoodethics.org/](http://www.heartwoodethics.org/). The Institute offers teaching manuals, teaching videos, a do-it-yourself training module that includes videos, and both a half-day and a full-day on-site professional development workshop led by a Heartwood staff trainer. A help desk, staffed by teachers with experience implementing the curriculum in the classroom, is available three days a week.

### Cost

Curriculum kits are sold in sets that cover two grades per set (PreK/K, K/1, 1/2, 2/3, 3/4, 4/5, and 5/6) and cost \$438 plus a 9% shipping and handling charge. Kits for grades 4–6 cost \$448 plus shipping and handling. The Spanish kit (grades K–3) costs \$495. Various training workshops are available, including half-day and full-day workshops ranging from \$750 to \$2,000. *Do-It-Yourself Training for Teachers* (\$29.95) provides a scripted training program with instructions. The book *A Lesson in Character*, designed as a primer for teaching *An Ethics Curriculum for Children*, is available for \$9.95 per grade.

Pennsylvania and southern Illinois. It compared outcomes for students participating in *An Ethics Curriculum for Children* program with outcomes for students in comparison classes that did not use a character education curriculum. The study focused on *An Ethics Curriculum for Children* as implemented in classrooms rather than as a schoolwide intervention.

## Effectiveness Findings

The WWC review of character education addresses student outcomes in three domains: behavior; knowledge, attitudes, and values; and academic achievement.

**Behavior.** On one behavioral measure, ethical conduct, the study reported a statistically significant worse outcome for students in grades 1–3 using An Ethics Curriculum for Children (compared with the group that did not receive the curriculum) and a statistically significant better outcome for the students in grades 4–6 using An Ethics Curriculum for Children. However, the differences for students in grades 1–3 and for students in grades 4–6 (as calculated by the WWC) were neither statistically significant nor large enough to be considered substantively important using WWC criteria.<sup>3</sup> On a second behavioral measure (simulated cheating), there were no statistically significant or substantively important differences for either grade range. Another behavioral measure, school disciplinary reports, was also included in the study, but the results were presented only at the aggregate school level and could not be compared in a way that met WWC evidence standards. So this measure was not included in the review.

**Knowledge, attitudes, and values.** For grades 1–3, Leming reported statistically significant better outcomes for students

using An Ethics Curriculum for Children on two character-related measures (ethical understanding and ethnocentrism) and no statistically significant difference on a third (ethical sensibility). For grades 4–6 statistically significant better outcomes were reported for students using An Ethics Curriculum for Children on one measure (ethical understanding), a statistically significant worse outcome on a second (ethical sensibility), and no difference on the third (ethnocentrism). The differences (as calculated by the WWC) in this domain were neither statistically significant nor large enough to be considered substantively important.<sup>3</sup>

### Rating of effectiveness

The WWC rates interventions as positive, potentially positive, mixed, no discernible effects, potentially negative, or negative. The rating of effectiveness takes into account four factors: the quality of the research design, the statistical significance of the findings (as calculated by the WWC), the size of the difference between participants in the intervention and the comparison conditions, and the consistency in findings across studies (see the [WWC Intervention Rating Scheme](#)).

## The WWC found *An Ethics Curriculum for Children* to have no discernible effects on behavior or on knowledge, attitudes, and values

### Improvement index

For each outcome domain, the WWC computed an improvement index based on the average effect size (see the [Technical Details of WWC-Conducted Computations](#)). The improvement index represents the difference between the percentile rank of the average student in the intervention condition and the percentile rank of the average student in the comparison condition. Unlike the rating of effectiveness, the improvement index is based entirely on the size of the effect regardless of the statistical significance of the effect, study design, or analysis. The improvement index can take

on values between –50 and +50, with positive numbers denoting favorable results. The average improvement index for behavior is 0 percentile points with a range of –4 to +4 percentile points across findings. The average improvement index for knowledge, attitudes, and values is 5 percentile points, with a range of –8 to +14 percentile points across findings.

### Summary

The WWC reviewed three studies on An Ethics Curriculum for Children. One study met WWC evidence standards with

3. The level of statistical significance was calculated by the WWC and where necessary, corrects for clustering within classrooms or schools, and for multiple comparisons. For an explanation see the [WWC Tutorial on Mismatch](#). See the [Technical Details of WWC-Conducted Computations](#) for the formulas the WWC used to calculate the statistical significance. In the case of the Ethics Curriculum report, corrections for clustering and multiple comparisons were needed.

reservations. It reported student outcomes in the behavior and attitudes, knowledge, and values domains for students in grades 1–3 and students in grades 4–6 separately. None of the WWC-computed overall effect sizes were statistically significant or large enough to be substantively important. So the WWC rated

the program as having no discernible effects in the behavior or the knowledge, attitudes, and values domains. Character education, an evolving field, is beginning to establish a research base. The evidence presented in this report is limited and may change as new research emerges.

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## References **Met WWC evidence standards with reservations**

Leming, J. S. (2000). Tell me a story: An evaluation of a literature-based character education programme. *Journal of Moral Education*, 29, 413–427.

### **Additional citations**

Leming, J., Henricks-Smith, A., & Antis, J. (1997). An evaluation of the Heartwood Institute's *An Ethics Curriculum for Children: Final report*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, IL. (Revised 4/1/2000).

Leming, J. S., & Silva, D. Y. (2001). A five year follow-up evaluation of the Heartwood Ethics curriculum on the

development of children's character. Retrieved from [http://www.heartwoodethics.org/docs/Heartwood\\_5\\_Year\\_Report.pdf](http://www.heartwoodethics.org/docs/Heartwood_5_Year_Report.pdf)

## **Did not meet WWC evidence screens**

Buttram, J. L., Kruse, J., & Silder, J. (1992). *Evaluation of the Heartwood Program: Final report*. Philadelphia, PA: Research for Better Schools, Inc.<sup>4</sup>

Piscolith, M. (1991). *Heartwood Program pilot year evaluation: 1990–91 full report*. Pittsburgh, PA: Pittsburgh Board of Public Education.<sup>5</sup>

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**For more information about specific studies and WWC calculations, please see the [WWC Ethics Curriculum Technical Appendices](#).**

4. Did not meet WWC evidence screens because study sample is not relevant; it did not assess student outcomes.

5. Did not meet WWC evidence screens because study did not use a comparison group.